

FOREWORD

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Oral History Interview

with

ROBERT AMORY, JR.

February 9, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: Mr. Amory, did you have any contacts with the President, or with John F. Kennedy, before 1961?

AMORY: Yes, they weren't terribly close. But I was in law school when he was in college, and he came into the Spee Club, which was the undergraduate club which I had been in and maintained strong interest in, and I knew him then as a bright and attractive undergraduate. By no means

not that [Kermit] Gordon and [Charles L.] Shultz aren't also good, but Bell, I felt, was being thrown to the wolves there. Of course, he's done a great job and I think was excellent there. I think [William B.] Macomber, who took Gaud's place, is very good. Below that I don't really have any strong views.

O'CONNOR: One thing that came up, Penkovsky. I wondered if you can say anything about Penkovsky.

AMORY: Well, all I can say is he provided us with uniquely valuable stuff that beautifully complemented the material we were getting from photographs. In other words, it gave us the detail and enabled us then to interpret our photographs better, and the photographs gave us the things to ask him as questions that he could put his technical friends.

And a combination of a highly placed spy and this capacity to look down on the whole Soviet Union put us in the securest possible position and had an awful lot to do with the 1962 missile crisis. Never before in history have two great powers come together on a collision course like that and one power known exactly what the other had. In other words, this is so different from 1914, where everybody was wondering who was mobilizing, what was going on and so on. But Kennedy knew minute by minute what was going on and exactly what the Soviets could do and the fact that they weren't taking the covers off their missile silos and so on and so forth. And I think the assurance with which he played his hand, and the whole executive committee with him, would not

have been there if you took away this solid intelligence. If we came back in what we were talking about earlier this morning, the missile gap stage, where you wondered whether the Soviets had ten missiles or five hundred or a hundred versus five hundred, everything would have been at sixes and sevens. But it wasn't.

O'CONNOR: I was once told that the decision or the critical point in the Cuban missile crisis -- and this may be completely false -- was when we discovered that they were bringing in nuclear warheads. They had put them on ships and were sending a nuclear warhead to Cuba. Do you know whether that's true or false? Did you ever hear that?

AMORY: I don't think it's true. I think we reacted. . . . Well, I think that the

warhead is something that we couldn't tell; we couldn't see. They could be in the hold. After all, they're not very big. What we saw were these medium range missiles and even a couple of the two thousand mile missiles that could have reached all the way to the Chicago-Duluth area -- or whatever the President said. And we just assumed they wouldn't send the missiles without the warheads. I wouldn't separate the two; I wouldn't make a particular hingeing point on them.

O'CONNOR: Okay, unless there's any other question you'd like to discuss. . . .

AMORY: I don't think so. When I get your transcript and go over it, I may think of some notes in which case I'll just dictate to my girl elaborations or corrections or something I may have slipped into saying.

O'CONNOR: We'd appreciate that.